U I’M

Nothing Special

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Contents

1	Chapter 1	1
2	Chapter 2	3
3	Chapter 3	6
4	Chapter 4	9
5	Chapter 5	12
6	Chapter 6	14
7	Chapter 7	16
8	Chapter 8	18
9	Chapter 9	20
10	Chapter 10	23
11	Chapter 11	26
12	Chapter 12	28
13	Chapter 13	31
14	Chapter 14	33

1

Chapter 1

The main character of our story is **José Garcia**. You might think he's someone special, that he goes on an exciting journey, endures tragedies, maybe even gains supernatural powers or finds true romantic love. After all, why else would *he* be the protagonist of a book? But if that's what you think, you're wrong. Because **José Garcia** is just an incredibly average person, just like everyone else, living the usual plastic-deposit life, and maybe he'll remember it fondly on his deathbed, believing that he was the protagonist of his own story. But how could he be, if he's the same as the supporting characters? This book could be about you, or me, or your neighbor, because in the end, *unus es ex multis*.

José Garcia was born on September 9, 2008 in a small Spanish town. His father is a mason of Brazilian descent, and his mother, a former teacher, is now a stay-at-home mom because of their son. He wasn't born into wealth, but they weren't poor either. When his mother finally managed to give birth, she cried, weeping along with the little boy, while the doctor smiled and praised her — this was **Maria Garcia**'s first childbirth. **Miguel**

Garcia hugged his wife. I think he was happy too — at the age of 21.

José Garcia and **Maria Garcia** stayed in the hospital for a while. During that time, **Miguel Garcia** always brought strawberry yogurt to his wife — it was her favorite. They smiled down at little **José Garcia**, the 3.3 kg, barely 50 cm bundle of life. Meanwhile, they made plans — how they'd get home, what they'd say to relatives, what they'd have for dinner. Maybe it really was a special moment. They looked at the nurse, who smiled — she's the one watching over the newborns, experiencing this same "special" moment every day. So much so, that when she arrives home exhausted, it's one of the reasons she enters her bedroom calculating how many more years until she can finally move out — maybe two. But what's the point of planning? She's probably happy anyway, since she chose nursing with joy, hoping to make other people's lives better. That hasn't changed, even though she has no time to see friends, always working overtime, always a few crazy patients at the hospital. Maybe she's even the reason newborns sometimes get mixed up. But she can handle it, right? She won't question her decisions or her life. (Right?)

2

Chapter 2

It was a bright, beautiful autumn day when newborn **José Garcia** first experienced his home, on September 12 — the place he'd spend the next 23-24 years. They say this is the best period in a person's life, or at least something like that.

Maria Garcia's parents were already waiting in the kitchen, even though they had visited just the day before — it seems they still couldn't get enough of seeing **José Garcia**. The still-brown-haired middle-aged woman held her grandson in her arms, speaking to him as if **José Garcia** understood. Her hair was still strong for her age, but she was getting older — maybe in 10–15 years, she'd end up in a nursing home. For now, she completely ignored that fact and felt blessed, even proud, because of **José Garcia**. Oh, how she would brag about him to her friends (or rather, her sighing peers), how she's now a grandmother too, like three of the four older women in her circle. Maybe tomorrow, after watching the morning news on

TV and complaining to her husband about how awful the country and government are. Meanwhile, she'll sip her coffee — black, with exactly two teaspoons of sugar — and if she feels it's a "special" day, and there's still some left from the batch she got from a "dear acquaintance," she'll add a drop of caramel. This acquaintance is a factory worker — they were neighbors for 23 years. The caramel, which she wraps daily on the production line, doesn't spoil easily, but if some are close to the expiration date or past it, she replaces the label and happily shares it with friends, who appreciate the gesture. **Maria Rodriguez**, holding **José Garcia** in the air, says a prayer — she's a religious woman and raised **Maria Garcia** the same way. **Maria** occasionally visits the church, but mostly prays at the wooden kitchen cross in difficult times, a habit she inherited from her mother.

The elderly, mustached man pats **Miguel Garcia** on the shoulder — the first physical touch in a long time, aside from handshakes with **Maria Rodriguez**. His reaction as a grandfather is natural — he wasn't overly excited at the sight of his grandson, but he's proud, because it's "his blood." He considers mentioning that the boy's eyes look just like **Maria Garcia**'s. In the end, he says it out loud, receiving a half-polite response from **Maria Rodriguez**, who claims the eyes resemble the grandfather's instead. Understandable — **Carlos Rodriguez**'s eyes have turned grayish-green from years of hard labor. He always worked on the farm until the military, where he got a small but permanent scar on his left forearm. After returning, he spent another five years on the farm, delivering milk twice a day in the village he grew up in. Dust clouds from the streets often hit him in the face while riding his old blue scooter. He's seen many things, things that await **José Garcia** too — though no one ever talks about them. **Carlos Rodriguez** left the earlier comment without

further reaction.

Miguel Garcia chuckled softly to himself. Nobody knew why, not even he did. But everyone was already used to this idyllic family picture, right? These little things happen without us noticing, and slowly the same thing happens in every "ideal" family home on that September 12th afternoon.

At dinner, **Miguel Garcia** looked over the table and suddenly regretted that his own parents couldn't be there. Maybe they'll visit tomorrow, or the next day. Or at that "pleasant" Sunday dinner when, supposedly, no one has anything urgent to do — except to maintain family ties, which become the most important social network after starting your own family. Because blood binds. (Or does it?)

3

Chapter 3

Maria Garcia and **Miguel Garcia** laid **José Garcia** in the oak crib. It was a comfortable crib — maybe **Miguel Garcia** could sleep in it too, if he could fit. He found the idea funny and shared the thought with his wife. They spun the mobile above the crib, that typical one you see in most baby stores — maybe they bought it because nine out of ten cribs had it in the store, or maybe they genuinely found it useful. They'll never really know, but for now they pretended not to care. Oh well — once it's just clutter, maybe they'll question it again, but until then, they pretend it doesn't matter, because it's just a small thing. And many small things couldn't possibly shape a large part of our lives, right?

Eventually **Maria Garcia** and **Miguel Garcia** went to bed — until **José Garcia** decided at 3:45 a.m. on September 13th to wake his parents with his crying. This became a daily occurrence in the house. **Maria Garcia** thought she was mentally prepared for it — after all, she'd heard it enough from acquaintances, seen it often on TV — but clearly, she wasn't fully trained for it, neither physically nor mentally. But that's okay — at least **Maria Garcia** found something else to complain about to her friends,

especially those who weren't parents yet. One more thing she could mention to her husband in the evenings, who, by this time, had returned to work. He seriously worried about how quickly they had burned through the money they had saved specifically for this period. In weaker moments, he blamed his wife. He even had thoughts like maybe he shouldn't have bought so much strawberry yogurt. Maybe if he could go back, he wouldn't do it again and would tell his wife it was for the sake of their future. Of course, at the time, during the "happiest moment of his life," it wouldn't have even occurred to him that the future wouldn't unfold exactly as he dopamine-filled brain imagined.

Miguel Garcia got up at 6 a.m. and headed to work with his coworkers — if you can call them that. He was a diligent and hard-working man, until he realized he could do what everyone else does — just work hard enough to make it *look* like he's struggling non-stop. Even if it wasn't entirely true, his job was still difficult — but then again, what job isn't difficult in its own way? Only the ones you look down on or don't understand. **Miguel Garcia** often looked down on people who boasted about earning money online, or those who were writers and not accountants, journalists and not paperboys, CEOs and not shopfloor workers. Many times, he wished he were in their place, since "they had it easier" — and maybe he was right.

That average Friday morning, they were tearing down a wall — dust and brick particles floated through the air. Nothing special happened. During lunch, **Miguel Garcia** thought about his son, and decided that with a father like him, the boy would grow up to be a real man. He would continue working hard for his family. That's the mindset of a strong and determined man — or at least that's what he learned, heard, and experienced, so he adopted this borrowed outlook as his own. He didn't really think beyond

it — like, what if physical strength won't be enough? But he was satisfied with himself for reaching such a conclusion.

Suddenly, his coworker interrupted him — a slightly overweight 29-year-old man. **Miguel Garcia** refers to him as a friend, since they've worked together for 4 years. He asked how he was, what it felt like to be a father. **Jorge Torres** didn't know it, but he only asked these questions out of habit and politeness. While **Miguel Garcia** answered, his mind was elsewhere — but he still listened, even asked questions in return. He wanted to seem friendly. He didn't have many friends anyway, and no wife or kids. He claimed he wanted to enjoy his youth first and focus on himself. He knew these were empty excuses, but maybe it slightly eased his father's disappointment toward him. **Jorge Torres**, now slowly entering his thirties, remained a simple, slightly overweight mason, who now seemed to bond more with **Miguel Garcia**. **Jorge Torres** had introduced **Miguel Garcia** to this world and this construction crew, where they both worked. They both had Brazilian roots and quickly hit it off one July evening in 2004, when **Jorge Torres** offered him the job. Since then, once a month — or every two months — they'd go to a nearby bar to drink with the usual crowd, the usual drinks, the usual music. Slowly, they drifted apart under the pretense of life's obligations. But no one noticed. They just enjoyed each other's company — unaware that maybe this would be the last time they'd gather in that dusty, old-fashioned, modest bar, watching the game together for the last time, sipping one last cold beer.

4

Chapter 4

The time had come — José Garcia's teeth started coming in. It was unpleasant for him and for Maria Garcia and Miguel Garcia too. Maria Garcia considered herself lucky — apart from a few occasions, the breastfeeding period went relatively smoothly. They noticed that José Garcia really liked the taste of apples — at least the mashed ones he could eat. They found this so interesting they told Carlos Rodriguez and Maria Rodriguez, who looked at them with strange expressions, almost as if they were proud. Because of this, Maria Rodriguez decided she wanted to feed José Garcia a real apple as soon as possible. Carlos Rodriguez, meanwhile, was talking to Miguel Garcia about a political movement in the capital — he had just read in the newspaper that lots of people were involved, and he claimed to know one of the supporters from when they used to live nearby and deliver milk to him. Carlos Rodriguez was proud of how many people he knew through his job. Even though he wasn't good at remembering names and faces, or at fully understanding family dynamics just from snippets and overheard sentences, people love to share these things with others. Most likely, others were also sharing partial thoughts about them. Not that anyone really cared, or was deeply affected by it — but misunderstandings happened, and that's just natural in such a society.

Miguel Garcia wasn't really into politics — he mostly used the TV for sports and action movies, and due to increasingly frequent overtime, even that was becoming rare. So he generally avoided political topics, but out of respectful obligation toward his father-in-law, he went along with it.

Meanwhile, the two women either listened to them or talked about **José Garcia**. An hour passed like this. The conversation

between the two men became livelier — but nothing serious. **José Garcia** watched as they spoke, absorbing the words, even if the others weren't aware of it — or didn't want to be. He picked up on the spicy remarks, the questions, the emotional tone — slowly forming his understanding of communication. He didn't understand a thing, but he was there, soaking it all in, and his brain handled it surprisingly well. But that's normal for babies — or at least, it should be.

In a nearby house, **Luis Fernandes Sánchez**, just seven months old, listened to his grandmother explaining a cake recipe to him — for some unexplainable reason — and how delicious it would be. Sometimes she sang, sometimes she complained about the oven. **Luis Fernandes Sánchez** was born 26 days before **José Garcia**, and now he too was sitting there, not understanding what was going on around him, just staring, sometimes laughing or crying — but constantly learning. Learning to be an average person.

5

Chapter 5

José Garcia found a stick resting on a flowerpot in the living room. He found it fascinating and examined the withered buds. He didn't know how it got there, nor did he care. He thought it was funny that when he waved it around, it made a swooshing sound. **Maria Garcia** was on the phone in the kitchen, unaware of her son's new "toy."

Meanwhile, **José Garcia** was dealing with a new task: learning how to walk. But he was happy to put that on hold in exchange for the discovery of such exciting things — like this stick. Perhaps his parents should imitate their son more often in this regard.

Maria Garcia entered the living room, took the stick from **José Garcia**, and told the person on the phone that he might poke his eye out with it. **José Garcia** was surprised by his mother's action but didn't say anything. His mother was surprised by his serious reaction — she expected him to cry.

Ten minutes later, with a long "yes, I'll call you later, okay, bye," she decided to continue teaching **José Garcia** how to walk. At first, he just giggled and resisted, but eventually, he gave it another try. He fell down again.

Maria Garcia had been speaking with a friend — or rather someone she had known since they were 13 years old; they were classmates once and even took a trip to the seaside before **José Garcia** was born.

Now **Ana González** was on vacation in Greece with her husband. She had found herself a wealthy man — they had met in college. **Maria Garcia** remembered clearly how **Ana González** talked only about him for an entire week. She said things like, "I imagine my whole life with him," and "I'd say yes even if he proposed today."

Young foolishness, some might say. But then and now are different times and places. That early, wild love fades, and that's exactly the part that romantic novelists tend to leave out.

Since then, **Ana González** had a short relationship with another man — it lasted only two weeks. Not even **Maria Garcia** knew about it. **Ana González** told herself it was because her husband didn't pay enough attention to her — and in a way, she was right.

Her husband also had a short relationship with a coworker, but no one knew about that, not even **Maria Garcia**. Now they were lying on the beach, their blonde hair full of sand, and **Ana González** was complaining that she'd have to wash it again. She took it as a sign from her horoscope, which said she'd do something she disliked today (as if people didn't do that every day). But she kept that thought to herself, because her husband was touchy about such things.

She once told him she was a Scorpio, and he got angry about it — although that might have had more to do with the fact that he'd just been rejected by his coworker. But the often-complaining and prematurely married 22-year-old **Ana González** had no idea about that.

6

Chapter 6

Miguel Garcia confidently drove his grey Trabant along the roads. In the back sat **José Garcia**, next to **Maria Garcia**. They were on their way to visit **Miguel Garcia**'s mother, who lived two towns over. The drive took about 30 minutes. **Isabella Garcia** hadn't seen her son or grandson for a month. She had been ill, but didn't tell her son — she didn't want to burden him with that.

She and her husband had moved out of Brazil 20 years ago, hoping for a better life. Her husband was a strong man, but one day, when **Miguel Garcia** was just 19, he suffered a stroke. No one expected it. Four days later, they buried him.

Isabella Garcia welcomed her grandson with kisses. She had prepared lunch for her only family members nearby. It wasn't a big meal — the old woman struggled to live off her pension. Sometimes she sold jam by the roadside — it helped distract her from her loneliness. Now she was just enjoying not being alone. She didn't really care who was with her anymore. She never liked **Maria Garcia**, but was afraid to tell her son — instead, she just doted on her grandson.

Perhaps she saw the future in him? Many elderly people — especially those who spend a lot of time alone — start seeing their children or grandchildren as their own future, or even their own reincarnation. It's a mindset often shaped by family pride or a long, solitary old age.

José Garcia was now walking confidently, and made full use of that ability. **Maria Garcia** wanted to buy him a baby walker. **Miguel Garcia** said to let him walk freely around the house. **José Garcia** was increasingly aware of the arguments — especially at home. Sometimes he looked as if he understood everything.

Lately, he seemed to be trying to speak. Three weeks ago, he said his first word: *"mmamma."*

Maria Garcia had been bathing him at the time, and she felt truly satisfied in that moment. She called her parents and told them the news — as people usually do.

Now **José Garcia** had found a new toy or playmate. **Isabella Garcia**'s cat — a small, short-haired Siamese, old and covered in scars. The cat loved pâté, so whenever it expired, they gave it to her — they had brought some with them this time too.

José Garcia tried to understand this new creature — sometimes he pulled at it, tugged on its fur, then petted it, even seemed to try speaking to it.

Just like how people get to know one another.

7

Chapter 7

A modest little acacia table stood in the middle of the living room. Cheap yellow balloons decorated the place, and some Spanish music played in the background. Then **Miguel Garcia** stepped in through the kitchen door with a vanilla-glazed cake, a number 3 candle on top. **José Garcia** had turned three years old.

It wasn't a big party — only the grandparents were present, **Ana González** and her husband, **Jorge Torres**, and a neighbor with her daughter, whom they had invited merely out of courtesy.

José Garcia laughed as he looked at his father. The cake, by the way, disappeared quickly, despite there having been appetizers. The next day, **Maria Garcia** blamed her husband for this "mistake."

A mistake that, at the time, no one really noticed — and even if they did, the conversations balanced it out. But such little things often matter more than the ones that actually change you — more precisely, the ones that turn you into a cliché — because they're sneaky.

But **José Garcia** simply enjoyed the whirlwind of flavors that

evening. He didn't think of the situation as unusual. Maybe in twenty-something years, he'll look back and understand.

Jorge Torres jokingly remarked that **José Garcia** had the same curly hair as his father.

Incidentally, **Jorge Torres** had started going on dates. He didn't boast about it, but he had met a girl on an online dating app — four years younger than him, a bit plain, short, with dyed hair, and worked as a vendor.

Maybe not the most flattering description, but he came to realize that someone like him shouldn't hope for much better.

Jorge Torres was the one who brought the cake from the store, while **Miguel Garcia**'s car was in the shop. The pastry chef was a 43-year-old divorced woman. She left her husband after he struggled with alcoholism. They never had children; she was her parents' only daughter.

She became a pastry chef because it was the only place that would hire her. As a child, she wanted to be a ballet dancer — which is, of course, not something to laugh at. Now she has flat feet and avoids theaters.

What she and **Jorge Torres** had in common was that they were both hopelessly looking for love online. They just hadn't met yet.

Who knows — maybe one day they'll see each other's face and say: "Heh, I think I've seen them somewhere before."

8

Chapter 8

Maria Garcia was browsing neckties. She had come to buy a shirt and suit for **José Garcia**, who was now busy examining his own reflection, making silly faces and finding it amusing.

He didn't like the music playing in the store.

They were preparing for **Jorge Torres**'s wedding, to which they had been invited as special guests.

They weren't expecting a big event — **Jorge Torres** didn't have that many acquaintances, anyway.

José Garcia started checking out the shoes and saw numbers on them. His mother explained those were the prices. He tried to process what that meant.

Being a good teacher, **Maria Garcia** explained it like this: if one apple costs this much, then that pair of shoes is worth 150 apples. **José Garcia** still looked confused but pretended he understood.

Eventually, he got a black formal suit with a striped shirt, but he refused to wear the tie, so **Maria Garcia** decided to let it go.

On the way home, it started raining. **Miguel Garcia** drove the family back after the successful shopping trip.

He thought the price was a bit steep, even though his wife had

rounded it down — and even threw away the receipt.

José Garcia watched the raindrops racing each other on the car window. His father was listening to music he liked more.

He already understood most of what his parents were talking about. He understood gossip and arguments — at least as much as he could. His parents always sent him away, saying, "The adults are talking now"; like when a week ago, at the grandparents' place, they discussed the suicide of a local pastry chef.

Carlos Rodriguez was convinced he knew the person.

José Garcia had already encountered the concept of death when **Isabella Garcia**'s cat died, or when he killed that big bug in the kitchen. He had heard the word often — especially when his father watched war dramas on TV.

But the concept was still unclear to him — except that death should be avoided.

Jorge Torres and **Emily Sanchez** got married on October 12, 2013, and moved into a rental home.

9

Chapter 9

José Garcia stepped through the gates with hesitation, once again wearing his striped shirt, holding tightly to **Maria Garcia**'s arm as she walked him to the door.

It was his first day of school. **Maria Garcia** had also gotten a new job at another school, so she hurried her son to make sure he wouldn't be late either.

As **José Garcia** walked down the hallway in his little striped shirt, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for him.

As **José Antonio Cruz** walked down the hallway in his little blue shirt, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for him.

As **Luis Fernandes Sánchez** walked down the hallway in his little white-polka-dotted shirt, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for him.

As **Maria Castillo** walked down the hallway in her little striped skirt, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for her.

As **Fernando Morales** walked down the hallway in his little

red tie, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for him.

As **Ana Sofia Delgado** walked down the hallway in her little red shoes, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for her.

As **Laura Morales** walked down the hallway in her little white bow, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for her.

As **Abigail Jackson** walked down the hallway in her little pink ribbon tie, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for her.

As **Miguel Ángel Navarro** walked down the hallway in his black patterned shirt, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for him.

As **Camilla Valentina Reyes** walked down the hallway in her little white dress, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for her.

As **David Jhonson Garcia** walked down the hallway in his little black patent shoes, everything suddenly felt unfamiliar. This was now the harsh outside world for him.

José Garcia knew only one of them — **Luis Fernandes Sánchez**, whom he had met on the street before. In fact, they had even played together once.

José was the bandit, **Luis Fernandes Sánchez** was the police-man.

The two boys both liked the tricolored popsicles available at the nearby corner store.

Luis Fernandes Sánchez was usually looked after by his grandmother, as his parents were often not at home. During those times, he always listened as **Luisa Sánchez** sang to him from the Bible.

The teacher allowed the two boys to sit next to each other.

10

Chapter 10

José Garcia came home from school tired — the house was empty. **Maria Garcia** was working late that day.

José Garcia sat down to do his homework when suddenly someone called out his name — it was **Luis Fernandes Sánchez**. They went outside.

José Garcia had received a *Batman* comic book from **Miguel Garcia** and showed it off to the gathered neighborhood kids.

Everyone pretended to be impressed. Some were genuinely jealous — especially because **José Garcia** could show off what he had.

They were already quite grown-up in that regard.

Three weeks earlier, on February 4, 2017, **Isabella Garcia** passed away. She had been battling cancer for a year.

Miguel Garcia cried at the funeral — not noticeably, but he wept after the burial.

José Garcia cried bitterly for his grandmother, though he didn't fully understand what had happened.

That day, **Miguel Garcia** slept a lot, then woke up and drank, using the death as an excuse.

Maria Garcia, cautiously but supportively, tried to help her husband.

Two days later, everything went back to normal.

They had finally reached the point where they could afford to join the smartphone owners club.

José Garcia got **Miguel Garcia**'s old button phone.

With that, he was one step closer to technological development — and uniformity.

But in that moment, it didn't matter — it was just one more thing he could tell his friends about. One more thing to make them feel a little more different from everyone else.

Though sometimes that even sounds appealing.

Miguel Garcia got home earlier than **Maria Garcia** that day, so he decided he would cook.

He made his personal favorite meat dish and even prepared enough to take for lunch the next day.

Maria Garcia arrived home exhausted — she didn't eat, just collapsed into bed.

Her husband looked at her disapprovingly but didn't say anything.

He remembered the young woman from whom they had bought the coffin — just for a fleeting moment, her face flashed in his mind — and then it passed.

A 27-year-old black-haired woman, wearing heavy powder, was looking at herself in the mirror. She was practicing her empathetic expression — it was part of her job.

She didn't like her job — exploiting other people's deaths, seeing grieving families, thinking about where the things she sold ended up, and how others viewed her — it all clashed with her values.

But then the money made her grow fond of it.

At night, she always wondered what to do with her life.

But at this point, it didn't really matter — just like for most people — she had already betrayed herself.

11

Chapter 11

José Garcia, the little fool, thought he was truly in love.

There was a girl in his class who had smiled at him four days ago. **José Garcia** was now completely infatuated, he even bought her chocolate — though he hadn't given it to her yet.

This — as they say — is a significant event in a person's life.

The moment of what you *think* is your first love.

It's important because it determines which group you'll end up in: those whose first love worked out, or those whose didn't.

But in the end, it doesn't matter — because eventually, both groups realize that love is simply the most ordinary mental illness.

José Garcia never gave her the chocolate, but one time he held her hand. Then they forgot about each other.

They were ten years old.

Maybe one day, **José Garcia** will look back on this "first great love."

For his twelfth birthday, **José Garcia** received an old office computer.

Naturally, he dove into the overwhelming world of the internet

and the wonders of pirated games.

Miguel Garcia and **Maria Garcia** didn't really understand much about it, so their son had free rein online.

José Garcia discovered that he liked detective films — he watched a lot of them at the time.

He wanted to be *Sherlock Holmes*, or at least a real detective.

It didn't take long for him to dive headfirst into the world of social media — first just one platform, then several.

They were all the same, just in different colors and designs.

And the point of using so many of the same thing — aside from not wanting to be left out if everyone else used them — was... well... actually, I don't know anymore. I must've forgotten.

Then **José Garcia** decided he wanted to be a content creator.

His first two videos were complete failures, and one of his classmates even recognized him, so he gave up on that dream.

That classmate was **Maria Castillo**.

People say she's kind and thoughtful.

In the evenings, she liked to watch the fire burn — that's how they heated the house.

She loved reading, and her father taught her to play piano.

She had her whole life ahead of her, and she was talented.

There was just one problem: she was very sickly.

Her parents didn't know why — maybe it was something serious.

Some days she couldn't even stand.

Maybe that's the price you pay when you might be able to achieve something.

But in the end, it won't matter.

In the end, nothing matters at all.

12

Chapter 12

Miguel Garcia was injured at work and had to stay in bed for a month.

Maria Rodriguez visited often while **Maria Garcia** was working.

José Garcia was preparing for an important test.

He was an average student, though he excelled in English and occasionally in other subjects too.

He was finishing his first year of high school.

He hadn't made any big plans yet.

Apparently, he had already given up on his detective dreams — now he considered them childish.

In secret, he had tried smoking.

Though he never admitted it, he had already drunk alcohol at places where his parents weren't around.

He liked someone again, and in the summer he wanted to get a job to buy a better computer.

He followed through on this plan — worked in a store stocking shelves for two weeks, and then worked five more weeks with his recovered father.

He was very proud of the result: the new computer — but even more so that he had earned the money himself.

He remained close friends with **Luis Fernandes Sánchez** — they spent most of their free time together.

One day, they went swimming at a lake, inviting many others.

While swimming, **José Garcia**'s leg got caught on a rope at the bottom of the lake.

They pulled him out within minutes.

He didn't tell anyone at home.

He thought about what would've happened if no one had been there.

José Garcia didn't understand who he really was.

He didn't know what he should be doing, where he was headed, or what he wanted.

He got fed up with everything, and often picked fights with his parents on purpose.

He joined a small gang formed by the kids who used to play on the street.

Or he just lay in bed listening to music.

He often imagined he was famous, successful.

Then realized he could never achieve it.

He fantasized about wild, romantic love — then after a single argument, he realized life didn't work that way.

José Garcia was angry because he didn't know anything — but pretended like he knew everything.

Luis Fernandes Sánchez stared at the moon through a window, secretly smoking a cigarette, convincing himself that it would help.

He hadn't seen his parents in two days — only heard their voices when they came home.

He pretended to be asleep.

At night, he wondered what to do with his life.

He imagined being rich, having an amazing girlfriend.

Then he sighed and decided it was all just childish fantasy.

He had always wanted to be a police officer.

While staring at the moon, he wondered if there was anyone who understood him, who was in the same situation.

For a strange moment, he denied the entire human race — then told himself there's no one else in the world like him.

13

Chapter 13

José Garcia decided he wanted to become an engineer — to earn a lot of money, get rich, and so on and so on.

He was thinking about which university to apply to, the one that would "change his future."

Just 8 minutes from his house, a girl his age was thinking the exact same thing — she also wanted to become an engineer.

Her parents had recently divorced.

They had told her so many times how sorry they were, that she herself started to feel sorry for herself.

Her mother was having dinner downstairs, and her father already had a new family — though he still met his daughter every two weeks and supported her financially.

Seventeen-year-old **Valentina Mendoza** wanted to fully distance herself from her parents.

Who knows — maybe she and **José Garcia** would meet one day.

Maria Garcia received her son's plans with skepticism.

Miguel Garcia, on the other hand, was delighted.

He told his son he was resourceful.

Maria Garcia said she never would've guessed **José Garcia** would want to be an engineer.

That summer, **José Garcia** met a sweet girl named **Sofia López**.

They fell in love, but neither of them told their parents until a Friday evening in 2026.

To **José Garcia**'s surprise, his parents received the news warmly.

Sofia López's parents were less enthusiastic — but eventually, they came around.

Thus, **José Garcia**'s third great love finally came true.

They were inseparable that summer.

Then **José Garcia** left for university — for the sake of his future.

Or so he thought

14

Chapter 14

José Garcia is now a 31-year-old engineer, a specialist.

He lives in a happy marriage with his wife, **Sofia Garcia**, and they have two children: **Maria Sarah Garcia** and **Fernando Garcia**.

José Garcia no longer has dreams — only desires.

Like a cold beer on a hot summer day, or an extra room for the kids.

The big dreams have been suppressed by the reality that everything can now be blamed on work, family, and such.

In everyday speech, this might be called growing up.

(Or maybe not — I'm not good at these things.)

Maria Garcia passed away on May 30, 2047.

José Garcia's boss was reluctant to let him go.

A hard-headed man, who merely lives out his days now — making money and staying alive.

He has no friends.

His children live abroad.

His wife died of cancer three years ago.

He wants nothing more than to take hot baths at home and

watch TV.

Maybe in this story, *he* is the successful one.

Carlos Rodriguez – May 20, 2048

Maria Rodriguez – March 11, 2050

Jorge Torres – July 2, 2053

Emily Sanchez – August 13, 2058

Miguel Garcia – January 4, 2064

José Garcia entered a retirement home at age 65, together with his wife, **Sofia Garcia**.

Only their son, **Fernando Garcia**, came to visit.

José Garcia had a stroke on November 28, 2081.

He was buried by his wife and two children.

Sofia Garcia died on December 10, 2082 — buried next to her husband.

Fernando Garcia had two children.

He lived a happy life — then divorced at 40.

At 50, he was hit by a car.

He was a plumber.

His sister, **Maria Sarah Garcia**, died childless at the age of 80.

Fernando Garcia's children were: **Dominic Garcia** and **Frederico Ángel Garcia**.

Dominic Garcia could have been a famous basketball player — but in the end, he wasn't.

He died at 67.

Child: **Amelia Garcia**

Frederico Ángel Garcia published two books in his life.

He tried for 10 years but never became a writer.

At 34, he became an alcoholic and died from an overdose.

Amelia Garcia married a rich man.

She became a singer.

Eventually realized her life wouldn't be any different just

because she was famous.

She had 3 children...

How long should I keep going with this line?

Don't you get it yet?

They're all the same.

One among the many — *unus es ex multis*.

You could have been in **José Garcia**'s place too.

In the end, you see — it doesn't matter.